



Legislative Bulletin.....October 16, 2001

Addendum

Contents:

H.R. 2716—Homeless Veterans Assistance Act

H.R. 2716—Homeless Veterans Assistance Act (Smith, Chris)

Order of Business: The bill is scheduled to be considered today, Tuesday, October 16th, under a motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill.

Summary: H.R. 2716 would change how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides assistance to homeless and other veterans and would consolidate several existing provisions of law dealing with homeless veterans into one chapter of Title 38 of the U.S. Code.

Comprehensive Homeless Services Centers. Requires the VA to establish comprehensive homeless services centers in the nation’s twenty largest metropolitan areas (though according to CBO, the VA already operates such centers in six of the largest metropolitan areas currently).

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program. Increases the authorization of appropriations to be used by the Department of Labor to integrate homeless veterans into the labor force from \$20 million to \$50 million a year for FY2002 and FY2003—and creates a new authorization of \$50 million a year for FY2004, FY2005, and FY2006. Although this program was authorized by Public Law 106-117, according to CBO the Congress has not yet appropriated any money for it.

Grant and Per Diem Programs. Authorizes the VA to provide a per diem payment to nonprofit organizations that covers not more than 50 percent of the daily costs of providing shelter to homeless veterans. Under current law, VA grants for the homeless may not subsidize the daily operating costs of homeless vet shelters.

Authorizes \$10 million for each of fiscal years 2003, 2004, and 2005 for a grant program to develop care for homeless veterans who are women, substance abusers, terminally ill, and parents with minor dependents.

Section 8 Vouchers. Requires the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to set aside vouchers out of Section 8 voucher funds to provide housing assistance to homeless veterans beginning in 2003. 500 vouchers would be set aside in FY2003, increasing to 2,000 vouchers by FY2006. The VA would then administer these vouchers for rental assistance to homeless veterans suffering from chronic mental illness (including those with substance abuse disorders).

Prison and Hospital Pilot Program. Establishes a pilot program to provide referral and counseling services to help prevent homelessness among veterans after they are released from prison or a hospital where they received long-term mental health treatment. The four-year pilot program would be implemented in at least six prisons or hospitals.

Mental Health. Requires the VA to offer mental health services at *all* VA facilities that furnish health care. According to CBO, about 120 VA primary care clinics do not provide any mental health services. Adding such services in these 120 clinics would cost roughly \$150,000 per clinic.

Domiciliary Care. Authorizes \$5 million a year for FY2003 and FY2004 for the VA to establish up to ten new programs for the purpose of providing domiciliary care to homeless veterans.

Dental Care. Allows certain homeless veterans to receive dental care that is necessary to gain employment, alleviate pain, or to treat certain cases of gingivitis and periodontitis. Presently, the VA can provide dental care only for service-connected disabilities or when dental care is medically necessary in order to receive other authorized medical care.

Grants for Grant Applications. Authorizes \$750,000 a year in fiscal years 2002 through 2005 for technical assistance grants to not-for-profit groups with experience in providing assistance to homeless veterans. These grants would help the groups in applying for grants to address problems of homeless veterans.

Non-VA Facilities. Extends for five years the VA's authorization to provide outreach services to homeless veterans and medical care in non-VA facilities, including community-based treatment facilities and halfway houses. The current authorization is set to expire on December 31, 2001.

Opioid Substitution Therapy. Requires the VA to implement this drug-addict treatment program at *all* of its 172 hospitals.

Cost to Taxpayers: CBO estimates that the bill would authorize an additional **\$129 million** in FY2002 and **\$1.046 billion** in the FY2002-FY2006 period, subject to annual appropriation. Most of these additional authorizations above the baseline in current law would be for veterans' medical care, with the remaining changes occurring to the Labor Department's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program and programs through HUD.

Does the Bill Create New Federal Programs or Rules?: Yes, the bill would mandate the creation of new homeless service centers, expand the use of grant programs, establish a prison and hospital pilot program, authorizes the creation of a multitude of mental health and domiciliary care programs, requires the provision of certain therapies at VA facilities, and extends and increases the funding authorizations for various aspects of programs for homeless veterans.

Constitutional Authority: A committee report citing constitutional authority is unavailable.

Staff Contact: Paul Teller, paul.teller@mail.house.gov, (202) 226-9718
